

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 17, 1880.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. CAMERON, of Pennsylvania, from the Committee on Naval Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. 813.]

*The Committee on Naval Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (S. 813) to amend section 1402 of the Revised Statutes relative to the appointment of assistant naval constructors, respectfully report:*

As will be seen by the following letter, the above-named bill is recommended by the Secretary of the Navy, with an amendment:

NAVY DEPARTMENT, Washington, February 18, 1880.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 2d instant, inclosing Senate bill 813, to amend section 1402 of the Revised Statutes relative to the appointment of naval constructors, and asking for my opinion as to the propriety of its becoming a law.

The principle of the bill meets the approval of the department. I beg leave, however, to call your attention to what is said in my last annual report in reference to naval constructors, and to suggest that the accompanying bill, prepared by the department, be substituted for Senate bill 813, herewith returned.

Very respectfully,

R. W. THOMPSON,  
Secretary of the Navy.

Hon. J. D. CAMERON,  
United States Senate.

The following is an extract from the annual report of the Secretary of the Navy, which the committee adopt as a part of their report; and it explains fully and concisely the object of the bill and the amendment which he recommends:

Authority is given by existing laws for the education of midshipmen and others as naval constructors or steam-engineers, provided they show a peculiar aptitude therefor. This is left discretionary with the Secretary. By the same law he is allowed to form a separate class of cadet-engineers, and otherwise afford them all proper facilities for such a scientific mechanical education as will fit them for steam-engineers or constructors. In the further provisions of the law, however, a practical distinction is made between steam-engineers and constructors in this, that the Secretary is authorized to appoint cadet-engineers to the number of twenty-five each year, but is not authorized to appoint cadet-constructors. This distinction is practically embarrassing. In the first place, when cadet-midshipmen are appointed from Congressional districts they enter the service with the hope and expectation of becoming officers of the line, all the grades and titles of which are open before them. And thus entering, there is no authority given to compel them, at the mere discretion of the Secretary, to change the whole course of their professional lives by making naval constructors out of them, and thereby take them away from the line and attach them to the staff. Nor would it be advisable to confer such authority upon the Secretary, because in many instances it might occur that cadet-midshipmen would prefer the course upon which they had entered, while the interest of the service, as viewed by the Secretary, might require them to adopt the other; and to force them against their

will to make this change would not only be violative of the spirit, if not the letter, of the law which authorizes their appointment, but manifestly unjust to them. In the second place, cadet-engineers are appointed as such, and not as cadet-constructors; and they are required, like cadet-midshipmen, to render two years' service on naval steamers. Consequently, to divert them from the studies peculiar to this profession and turn them into another and different profession would be, in many cases, as unjust to them as to the cadet-midshipmen.

But the proper remedy may be furnished and the whole difficulty overcome if Congress will authorize the annual appointment of such number of cadet-constructors as may be deemed necessary to be educated as such. This will be simply to place cadet-engineers and cadet-constructors upon the same footing. Then each class will pursue the course of study adapted to its profession, and we may reasonably expect to realize within a few years the benefits of having well and thoroughly educated constructors as well as engineers in distinct professions. We shall then look to the former as other nations do—to lay down the lines and regulate the tonnage, displacement, and sailing qualities of our ships of war, and to the latter to furnish them with such engines, boilers and machinery as will give them additional speed and secure perfect safety to them at sea.

The committee, therefore, report the bill back with an amendment in the nature of a substitute, and recommend its passage.

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